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United States Department of Agriculture,

BUREAU OF PLANT INDUSTRY,

Seed and Plant Introduction and Distribution,

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ALFALFA (*Medicago sativa*).

[Instructions adapted to the irrigated and humid sections of the western half of the United States.]

Alfalfa is an upright, smooth, perennial, leguminous forage plant. The rapid extension of this plant throughout the country is fully justified by its importance and value as a feed. It will grow in favorable soil from sea level to an elevation of 7,000 feet or more.

Soil requirements.—Alfalfa requires a deep, well-drained soil, reasonably free from weeds. Its long taproots necessitate a permeable subsoil. It will not withstand flooding for more than thirty-six hours without serious injury, especially in the growing season. Undrained soil conditions are very unfavorable to its growth. It will not stand an excess of alkali in the soil, especially when young. The older plants, however, are more alkali resistant. It is essential that the soil be well supplied with lime. Most soils throughout the section specified above contain sufficient lime, but in limited sections liming may be necessary.

Preparation of the soil.—The ground selected should be put in the best possible condition by harrowing. It is best to prepare the ground some time before seeding in order to enable it to become thoroughly settled.

Sowing the seed.—Alfalfa should be sown broadcast or drilled in, usually at the rate of 15 to 20 pounds per acre. Good stands are secured under favorable conditions by the use of as small a quantity as 10 pounds per acre, but this is only where its requirements are thoroughly understood. Spring seeding is the general practice except in the Southwest, where it is often seeded in the fall either with or without a nurse crop. In the irrigated sections spring seeding with a nurse crop is commonly practiced, although it is in most places considered best for the alfalfa that it be seeded alone.

Treatment of stand.—If weeds prove troublesome, the field should be mown to a height of 5 inches to prevent them from smothering the young alfalfa plants. Ordinarily alfalfa should be cut when about one-tenth of the heads are in blossom. This will insure a good quality of hay and make possible a rapid growth of the alfalfa for the next crop. It is necessary to mow the alfalfa rather high the first season, as if cut low the plants are slow to recover. Alfalfa should not be pastured the first year and but very sparingly the second. It is an excellent practice to disk an old alfalfa field. This may be done each season or at longer intervals if the stand shows no signs of deterioration. The disking should be done immediately after a crop has been removed. This will aerate the soil, retard the growth of weeds, and stimulate the alfalfa.

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